Life

Tips for parents of defiant children

How do you deal with the child who emerges from its mother's womb kicking and screaming — and never stops? Tomorrow in Life

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Chocolat: Juliette Binoche plays a woman who opens up a chocolate shop in a conservative 1950s French village. Also stars Judi Dench, Alfred Molina, Lena Olin and Johnny Depp.

Recess: School's Out: Disney's Saturday morning cartoon goes feature length as the kids try to stop a plan to cancel summer.

3000 Miles to Graceland: Some ex-cons conjure up a plan to rob a Las Vegas casino dressed as Elvis impersonators during Elvis week. The Elvis-clad cast includes Kurt Russell, Kevin Costner, David Arquette and Christian Slater.

These Old Broads: This made-for-TV flick pulls in the diva power with Debbie Reynolds, Shirley MacLaine, Joan Collins and Elizabeth Taylor.

On record racks

Aaron Carter "Oh Aaron"
Usher "8701"
Better Than Ezra "Closer"
DJ Krush "Zen"
Freedy Johnston "Right Between the Promises"

On television

"The Wayne Brady Show," 7 p.m. Wednesday, ABC: Comedian Wayne Brady, whose improvisational skills, musical talents and funny characters have made him a standout on Drew Carey's "Whose Line Is It Anyway?," hosts and stars in a new comedy-variety series premiering as a one-hour special. The show's normal half-hour time slot will be Wednesdays at 7:30.

"Family Television Awards," 7 p.m. Friday, CBS: On the heels of a report that television's "family hour" has seen an increase in violence and foul language, comes the second Family Television Awards. Reba McEntire hosts the show, which will honor "Everybody Loves Raymond," "The West Wing," Michael J. Fox and Della Reese, among others.

Videos and CDs are released on Tuesday; release dates are subject to change.

The Gazette
www.gazette.com

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S. Giraud/Fine Line-C 2001 Fine Line Features

John Cameron Mitchell, the writer, director and star of "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," is poised for great success in Hollywood. The gender-bending musical, "Hedwig," is being touted as the most likely sleeper hit film of the summer — not too bad for an off-Broadway show that began life with a two-year run in a dilapidated hotel ballroom in Greenwich Village.

Raising Hedwig

Actor-director's parents meet son's success with reticent pride

ON SCREEN
by Warren Epstein

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To understand the tangled mix of pride and discomfort Joan and John Henderson Mitchell feel when they watch their son's alter ego on stage and screen, you have to look at the pictures on their grand piano.

One shows son John Cameron Mitchell, writer, director and star of the new film "Hedwig and the Angry Inch" — a man on the verge of becoming America's pre-eminent drag queen. Beside that is a picture of Joan Mitchell shaking hands with the pope.

The Mitchells consider themselves a conservative family.

They've lived all around the world but chose to settle in a traditional home in the Broadmoor area. They attend church regularly. Their military ties run deep. John Henderson Mitchell, a retired army major general, was in charge of the American forces in West Berlin in the mid-80s (that's why he and his wife rated an audience with the pope).

They're thrilled that their 38-year-old son is becoming a star. They just wish he could achieve fame without wearing skirts and singing about a botched sex-change operation.

But, like it or not, it's Hedwig, the rockin' German transsexual, who's taking John Cameron Mitchell's career into the stratosphere.

The character was born in a cabaret show that became an outrageous off-Broadway rock-opera, "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," written by Mitchell and composer Stephen Trask.

A film version premiered in January at the Sundance Film Festival, taking awards for audience choice and best director in a drama. In recent weeks, the Mitchells have traveled the world to see the adulation heaped on their son at festivals and premieres.

Predicted to be the sleeper hit of the summer, "Hedwig" opened this weekend in Denver and arrives in Colorado Springs on Sept. 16 for the Lavender Film Festival.

When the Mitchells first saw the stage version of "Hedwig," they hardly knew what to think.

"My first thought was, This is so unlike Johnny. He's such a soft-spoken young man," Joan says. "But on stage he's like an explosion."

What did Dad think?

Arms crossed, standing in his parlor, John Henderson Mitchell furrows his brow.

"I was ... ummm. ... I think I was overwhelmed by it and surprised by it," he says. "Not only was the show over the top and just exploding in your face, it had all this audi-

See HEDWIG LIFE2

JERILEE BENNETT The Gazette

Joan and John Henderson Mitchell are the proud parents of hot new movie director and star John Cameron Mitchell. The Mitchells, who live in the Broadmoor area and have deep ties to both the church and the military establishment, do, however, have somewhat mixed feelings about their son's gender-bending success.

Frequent moves played major role in actor's life

By Warren Epstein
The Gazette

It's hard to reconcile the thoughtful, soft-spoken man on the phone with John Cameron Mitchell's film persona — a drag queen named Hedwig who belts out rock 'n' roll tirades with the ferocity of a young David Bowie.

Hedwig is the title character in "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," an over-the-top glam-rock musical that's taking the festival and art-film circuits by storm.

Mitchell, 38, who wrote, directed and stars in the film about a transsexual's search for love and fame, has strong ties to Colorado Springs. Mitchell attended Stratton Elementary School, and his parents have retired in the Broadmoor neighborhood.

But Mitchell's memories of the Springs are vague.

"I remember getting in a car accident on Hancock and breaking my collarbone," he says. "My dad was in Vietnam at the time, so I remember getting his tapes and letters regularly. But we moved every couple of years when we were kids."

That constant relocation, which took Mitchell to boarding schools in America, Germany and Scotland, affected him more than any one place he lived.

"It was strange, you know. You have to get a whole new group of friends everywhere you go, change your accent to fit in," he says. "I'm sure that made me into an actor, in a way."

Mitchell also found himself struggling to hide his sexuality. At about 13 or 14, he realized he was gay.

"It was the '70s and '80s and you couldn't find people like yourself without great risk of getting ostracized," he says.

When he was a young teenager, he looked at his homosexuality as a curse, something to hide. But as an adult, he's come to look at his sexual orientation a lot differently.

"Being gay in and of itself is kind of boring, but it can be a kind of privilege and a gift, depending on what you do with it," Mitchell says. "If you reject the idea that it's wrong or amoral to be gay, then it forces you to question all kinds of things."

This gift of a questioning mind, along with a natural proclivity for acting, propelled Mitchell's theatrical career.

A few weeks from graduation at Northwestern University, Mitchell left school to take a gig as an understudy for the role of Huck Finn in the Broadway musical "Big River."

He followed that with a role in John Guare's "Six Degrees of Separation."

He returned to Colorado in the late '80s to star in "Peter Pan" at the Denver Center Theater Company.

In 1991, he performed what would be his father's favorite role, as Dickon, the proprietor of nature in a musical adaptation of the children's classic "The Secret Garden."

By the mid-'90s, his sexuality began to play a bigger role in the parts he chose. He played a young version of Larry Kramer, the AIDs-stricken hero in the drama "The Destiny of Me," and a boy named Young Thing in "Hello Again," a series of romantic and sexual vignettes.

But all along, the ideas for Hedwig were percolating in his mind. The character was, in part, inspired by Helga, an East German house cleaner who babysat for his little brother (who died of a heart condition at age 4). Helga seemed to have another job on the side, involving frequent male callers.

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See MITCHELL LIFE2

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Hedwig: Former maid inspired character

From LIFE!

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In his play and film, his character Hedwig fights for acceptance as a transsexual.

In real life, John often fought for acceptance as a homosexual.

Joan and John Henderson Mitchell will never forget the night when he called them from Northwestern University to drop the bombshell.

"It was hard," Joan admits. "The first thing I thought of is, 'No more little Johnnys.' "

But John quickly reminded her, "Mom, you'll always have your son."

"Johnny, is there anything we did that made you choose to be this way?" she asked.

"Why would I choose to be this way?" he responded. "Look how homosexuals are treated!"

Joan smiles. It's clearly not a painful memory, but one of an obstacle overcome.

"What do you do?" she asks with a shrug. "You love your son. What are you going to do? It's not what we would have wished for him, but you can't choose their lives for them."

Dad also struggled with John's sexual orientation, but he's come to some peace about it.

"He's a homosexual man," he says. "There's a difference between being gay and being homosexual, so I'm informed. He doesn't act it out or march in parades or festivals. . . . John, in his normal life, is a businessman and author and actor, and he dresses very conservatively."

"He doesn't flaunt it," Joan puts in.

Hedwig, however, flaunts it big time.

The Mitchells love the movie anyway, just as they continue to love and accept their son.

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BACK PAGES

50 YEARS AGO: A caving rock wall foundation was pointed out as the cause for the gas accumulation which exploded the home of the Ardith E. Thanscheidt family at 2821 W. Kiowa Street to destruction early yesterday morning, killing one and injuring four members of the family.

75 YEARS AGO: Eleventh-hour entries came into The Gazette and Telegraph offices in a volume last night which soared the total number of bathing beauties and swimming stars for the Broadmoor bathing beach tournament this weekend past last year's high mark.

100 YEARS AGO: This afternoon Mayor Robinson delivered the address of welcome to the members of the Western Negro Press association and the first day's session was opened. J.M. Booker of this city, who is secretary of the association, is soon expected to lead the forces to advocate a return to the mother country of all the Negroes of America.

Compiled by the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum from past issues of The Gazette. Contact the museum at 385-5990.

TODAY IN HISTORY

1861: The federal government levied an income tax for the first time.

1864: During the Civil War, Union Admiral David G. Farragut is said to have ordered, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!" as he led his fleet against Mobile Bay, Ala.

1884: The cornerstone for the Statue of Liberty was laid on Bedloe's Island in New York Harbor.

1914: The first electric traffic lights were installed, in Cleveland, Ohio.

1957: "American Bandstand," hosted by Dick Clark, made its network debut on ABC.

1962: Actress Marilyn Monroe, 36, was found dead in her Los Angeles home; her death was ruled a probable suicide from an overdose.

1963: The U.S., Britain and the Soviet Union signed a treaty in Moscow banning nuclear tests in the atmosphere, in space and underwater.

1980: Hurricane Allen battered the southern peninsula of Haiti, leaving more than 200 dead in its wake.

1984: Actor Richard Burton died at a hospital in Geneva, Switzerland, at the age of 58.

The Associated Press

'Cherokee' rooted in writer's rich heritage

COMICS FAN
by Bill Radford

Radford's column appears Sundays in Life.
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American Indian myths are a springboard for "Tales of the Cherokee."

In searching for a comics project to stir his creative juices, Gene Gonzales looked not to the high-flying costumed heroes that he loved as a child but to his rich American Indian heritage.

"Tales of the Cherokee" is the result — three ancient stories adapted and illustrated by Gonzales. The tales, in simple, charming fashion, draw on Cherokee myth and legend passed down from generation to generation to answer such questions as how the world was made and why moles live underground.

"From the beginning I wanted to write and draw my own creation," says the 38-year-old Gonzales, a commercial illustrator in Tennessee who has done numerous covers and other work for small-press books as well as a bit of work for bigger comics companies such as DC. "But I didn't find anything that I was really passionate about. This project was what I was looking for."

The idea of "Tales of the Cherokee" or something like it, using American Indian myths as a springboard, had been running through his head for years, he says. Gonzales, who has ties to southern Colorado — his father lives in Pueblo — is part Choctaw Indian.

"The heritage comes from my mom's side of the family," he says. "My great-grandmother was a full blood. I spent vacations with her in Texas and Oklhahoma when I was young. She even spoke the language."

A longtime comics fan who grew up entranced by the adventures of Superboy, the Teen Titans, Green Arrow and others, Gonzales cites a long list of comics artists who influenced him. "And if you look at my artwork from my school days, you will see swipes from every one of them," adds Gonzales, who describes his style as "somewhere between realistic and cartoony. . . . I tend to let the material dictate the style."

Despite his fondness for the superheroes of his past, he says he's happy sharing his own vision. Comics that are considered mainstream — books such as "X-Men" and "Superman" — reach a lot of comics readers, he says, but not the general public, not the mainstream of society.

"The group I would like to reach includes the comic-buying public and the people who have an interest in Native American folklore. The Barnes & Noble customer looking for something different. The parents who want to show their kids a new world."

"Tales of the Cherokee" is the first title from Gonzales' Mandalay Books and is available for order through comic shops; the book was featured in the July issue of Previews — sort of the comic-book world's version of TV Guide — and arrives in comic-book stores in September.

Meanwhile, Gonzales is hard at work on "Tales of the Cherokee" No. 2, which will feature another trilogy of stories along with a pinup by Michael Avon Oeming, the artist on Image's "Powers." And Mandalay Books plans to publish a second title as well, "McCandless & Company," a detective series written and created by "Cherokee" editor JC. Vaughn. Matt Busch will illustrate the first issue; Gonzales will handle the art on the second.

Hedwig: Former maid inspired character

From LIFE1

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Mitchell got the idea of using bits of Helga to tell a modern fable informed by Plato's "Symposium." He loved the idea that at one time humans had two heads and two sets of arms and legs and that Zeus, fearing their power, split them in half.

He created Hansel, a gay East German boy whose quest for love is cast as a search for "his other half." He thinks he's found the object of his desire in a handsome American GI who wants to take him home, but only after Hansel has a sex-change operation and changes his name to Hedwig.

The operation goes bad, and when the soldier dumps her, Hedwig, wearing a wig that looks like Farrah Fawcett, meets George Washington, forms a rock band and tours America as an "internationally ignored song stylist."

"I was attracted to the idea of someone a bit damaged by the world who survives and learns from her experiences," Mitchell says.

Along with friend and composer Stephen Trask, Mitchell fashioned a rough version of what would become "Hedwig and the Angry Inch" and performed it at an East Village drag club.

The role of Hedwig presented all kinds of challenges for Mitchell. For one thing, he'd never performed in drag.

"I was coming at it from the point of view of an actor," Mitchell says. "So all the real queens who'd been living the parts, doing drag performances every night, were saying, 'Who do you think you are? Why should you get a whole gig here?' I really had to work to gain their respect."

Mitchell also had to overcome his own discomfort with taking on a feminine persona.

"I was kind of scared of it," he admits. "When you're a gay boy, for whatever reason, you tend to be more aware of gender roles, and a big fear is being identified as gay. So you think about how you hold your books and how you walk.

"The worst thing you could be was a girl: 'Oh, don't be such a girl!' " he says. "Even girls were told, 'Don't be a girl.' There's no homophobia without misogyny. For the feminized man, it's always been tough."

But Mitchell found that the more time he spent in Hedwig's high heels, the more liberating it was.

"It took playing Hedwig to clear the last of that out of my system," he says.

When Mitchell and Trask felt they'd shaped "Hedwig" to what they wanted, they took it off-Broadway. It became an instant hit, garnering rave reviews and attracting a devoted gaggle of groupies calling themselves Hedheads.

After the show's two-year run, Mitchell accepted an invitation to work at the Sundance Filmmakers Lab in Utah, an intensive directing workshop for promising artists. He found that he liked working with a camera, and soon went to work on a film version of "Hedwig."

Shooting lasted only 28 days.

The film returned to Utah in January for the Sundance Film Festival, where it took the coveted Audience Award and Director Award for a dramatic film.

Since then, it's been praised up and down by nearly every national publication.

Some writers compare it to "The Rocky Horror Picture Show," though it's much deeper.

"I can understand why they'd use that as a shorthand to describe the film to people," Mitchell says. " 'Hedwig' certainly has a glam-rock surface. But 'Rocky Horror' was a fun exercise in camp. Hopefully, our film has more emotions and ideas being touched upon. 'Hedwig' is also more real. This character could exist in the real world."

Mitchell has been somewhat taken aback by the raves the film has received. The play was always popular in the gay community, and the movie has been similarly embraced by gay culture.

But the appeal doesn't stop there.

"I think maybe that's because the tone is welcoming to all people," Mitchell says. "Through the music and the humor it invites everyone to make use of her story and find comfort in it."

Now that "Hedwig" has launched Mitchell to national prominence, naturally, he's getting offers from Hollywood.

But they're not the kind of offers that interest him.

"I get the kind of offers they give to actors they don't know what to do with — villain in a big action movie. I've got a few of those," he says.

Instead, Mitchell wants to do more writing. He's currently working on a screenplay for a children's movie.

"It's kind of like a cross between 'Willy Wonka' and 'Fanny and Alexander,' " he says.

No doubt, Hedheads will be disappointed. They're probably hoping for "Hedwig II."

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

Q I have alot of stress in my life and just don't know how to cope with it. Any suggestions? When the roof caves in at your house, when your little girl gets the measles or your teenager flunks a course in school or your spouse gets laid off at work, how do you cope with the stess?

A Your quetion reminds me of an old baseball story about Bill Clem, a famous National League umpire. He used to have a habit of hesitating a minute before signaling a ball or astrike. It was just a quirk of his. One day there was this hotshot young pitcher on the mound who would fire away, and Bill Clem would take his time calling the pitch.

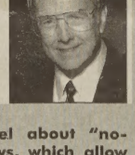
Finally, in about the sixth inning, the kid was getting irritated. He threw one crucial pitch and then just couldn't help yelling, "Come on, Bill. What is it?"

Clem pulled off his face mask, stared the kid down, and said, "It ain't nothing 'till I call it something."

Well, that's kind of the way it is in life. We can't stop the curve balls from coming our way, but we do get the privilge of deciding what to call them. You can determe whether a stressful time is the most horribl, terrible, unfair thing that ever happened to yu, or whether it's just another common problm that you'll manage to get through someho.

Remember als that the way you react is being watched carefull by your kids. If we show them that we can copethey'll also be more likely to handle their stress more easily.

Dr. James Dobson



Q How do you feel about "no-fault divorce" laws, which allow for the dissolution of marriage without cause? If one party wants out, he or she can get out. Has this been a good policy?

A The concept of "no-fault divorce" was introduced in California in 1969, making it the first jurisdiction in the Western world to radically alter its divorce law. In the next 15 years, every state in the U.S. adopted some form of no-fault legislation. The idea took the nation by storm.

Statistical evidence for the past three decades verifies that no-fault divorce has been a disaster for the family. According to Statistical Abstracts of the United States, the number of divorces in this country has increased by 279 percent since these laws began taking effect in 1970. The number of children living with a divorced parent has increased 352 percent in that same period. Demographer Dr. Paul Glick has predicted that one-third of all children will live in a stepfamily before they reach their 18th birthday.

I agree with those who contend that the liberalization of divorce laws undermined the sanctity of the home and condemned millions of children to a life of poverty and heartache.

In essence, no-fault divorce laws have effectively nullified the act of marriage, making it an unenforceable contract. A person can abandon his or her family more easily than that person can abrogate any other agreement that bears his signature. Of greatest concern is the welfare of the husband or wife who is unwillingly confronted with divorce, custody battles and rejection. That responsible individual has absolutely no power in the dissolution of the family. But the other spouse, even the person who chases after a younger playmate or a "grand new freedom," is the one in charge.

There is a lesson to be learned from this regrettable exercise in social engineering. The institution of the family is the basic unit of society — the ground floor on which the entire culture rests. If it collapses, everything of value will go down with it. We should never tamper with it frivolously or undermine its rationale for existence.

Dr. James Dobson is president of the nonprofit organization Focus on the Family, P.O. Box 444, Colorado Springs, Colo. 80903; or www.family.org. Questions and answers are excerpted from "The Complete Marriage and Family Reference Guide" published by Tyndale House. Copyright 2001 JAMES DOBSON INC. DISTRIBUTED BY UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE, 4520 Main St., Kansas City, MO 64111; (816) 932-6600.

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Hedwig: Former maid inspired character

From LIFE1

ence participation going on. I was dumbfounded."

Ultimately, he says he was amazed and impressed by the range of his son's talent.

"But I have to say that I'm more a 'Guys & Dolls'-type of theatergoer," he adds.

"Hedwig and the Angry Inch" has plenty of guys and dolls, but not of the same sort Dad is talking about.

It's about a boy from East Berlin named Hansel, who embarks on a quest for true love and rock 'n' roll stardom. The journey leads him to get a sex-change operation that doesn't quite work (hence the "Inch" in the title), change his name to Hedwig and to move to America.

John Cameron Mitchell told The Gazette the character was inspired by Helga, a cleaning lady for the family when they lived in Kansas. Like Hedwig, Helga apparently supplemented her income with a steady stream of gentleman callers.

"Apparently, the boys (John and his brother Colin) used to visit Helga in her trailer, where she had another business on the side," Joan says. "She'd get a customer and send the boys home. . . . I had no idea this was happening."

> "What do you do? You love your son. What are you going to do? It's not what we would have wished for him, but you can't choose their lives for them."
>
> **Joan Mitchell**

There's a lot more the Mitchells didn't know about their son John, who attended kindergarten at Stratton Elementary School.

Until they saw him perform as Huck (he was the understudy) in the Broadway run of "Big River," they didn't know he could sing.

They were amazed a few years later when his sweet voice captivated audiences in a musical adaptation of the children's classic "The Secret Garden."

But, even more significant than their ignorance of his singing voice, they didn't know until he was 20 years old that John was gay.

In his play and film, his character Hedwig fights for acceptance as a transsexual.

In real life, John often fought for acceptance as a homosexual.

Joan and John Henderson Mitchell will never forget the night when he called them from Northwestern University to drop the bombshell.

"It was hard," Joan admits. "The first thing I thought of is, 'No more little Johnnys.' "

But John quickly reminded her, "Mom, you'll always have your son."

"Johnny, is there anything we did that made you choose to be this way?" she asked.

"Why would I choose to be this way?" he responded. "Look how homosexuals are treated!"

Joan smiles. It's clearly not a painful memory, but one of an obstacle overcome.

"What do you do?" she asks with a shrug. "You love your son. What are you going to do? It's not what we would have wished for him, but you can't choose their lives for them."

Dad also struggled with John's sexual orientation, but he's come to some peace about it.

"He's a homosexual man," he says. "There's a difference between being gay and being homosexual, so I'm informed. He doesn't act it out or march in parades or festivals. . . . John, in his normal life, is a businessman and author and actor, and he dresses very conservatively."

"He doesn't flaunt it," Joan puts in.

Hedwig, however, flaunts it big time.

The Mitchells love the movie anyway, just as they continue to love and accept their son.

But that didn't stop Dad, after first seeing the "Hedwig" film at Sundance, from gently nudging John with, "Johnny, do you think you'll do any more shows like 'The Secret Garden'?"

John laughed and said, "Oh, Dad, this is the 21st century."

Mitchell: 'Hedwig' was first drag role

From LIFE1

son," Mitchell says. "Very glamorous and world weary. Sort of a tube-top Marlene Dietrich."

Mitchell got the idea of using bits of Helga to tell a modern fable informed by Plato's "Symposium." He loved the idea that at one time humans had two heads and two sets of arms and legs and that Zeus, fearing their power, split them in half.

He created Hansel, a gay East German boy whose quest for love is cast as a search for "his other half." He thinks he's found the object of his desire in a handsome American GI who wants to take him home, but only after Hansel has a sex-change operation and changes his name to Hedwig.

The operation goes bad, and when the soldier dumps her, Hedwig, wearing a wig that looks like Farrah Fawcett, meets George Washington, forms a rock band and tours America as an "internationally ignored song stylist."

"I was attracted to the idea of someone a bit damaged by the world who survives and learns from her experiences," Mitchell says.

Along with friend and composer Stephen Trask, Mitchell fashioned a rough version of what would become "Hedwig and the Angry Inch" and performed it at an East Village drag club.

The role of Hedwig presented all kinds of challenges for Mitchell. For one thing, he'd never performed in drag.

"I was coming at it from the point of view of an actor," Mitchell says. "So all the real queens who'd been living the parts, doing drag performances every night, were saying, 'Who do you think you are? Why should you get a whole gig here?' I really had to work to gain their respect."

Mitchell also had to overcome his own discomfort with taking on a feminine persona.

"I was kind of scared of it," he admits. "When you're a gay boy, for whatever reason, you tend to be more aware of gender roles, and a big fear is being identified as gay. So you think about how you hold your books and how you walk.

"The worst thing you could be was a girl: 'Oh, don't be such a girl!' " he says. "Even girls were told, 'Don't be a girl.' There's no homophobia without misogyny. For the feminized man, it's always been tough."

But Mitchell found that the more time he spent in Hedwig's high heels, the more liberating it was.

"It took playing Hedwig to clear the last of that out of my system," he says.

When Mitchell and Trask felt they'd shaped "Hedwig" to what they wanted, they took it off-Broadway. It became an instant hit, garnering rave reviews and attracting a devoted gaggle of groupies calling themselves Hedheads.

After the show's two-year run, Mitchell accepted an invitation to work at the Sundance Filmmakers Lab in Utah, an intensive directing workshop for promising artists. He found that he liked working with a camera, and soon went to work on a film version of "Hedwig."

Shooting lasted only 28 days.

The film returned to Utah in January for the Sundance Film Festival, where it took the coveted Audience Award and Director Award for a dramatic film.

Since then, it's been praised up and down by nearly every national publication.

Some writers compare it to "The Rocky Horror Picture Show," though it's much deeper.

"I can understand why they'd use that as a shorthand to describe the film to people," Mitchell says. " 'Hedwig' certainly has a glam-rock surface. But 'Rocky Horror' was a fun exercise in camp. Hopefully, our film has more emotions and ideas being touched upon. 'Hedwig' is also more real. This character could exist in the real world."

Mitchell has been somewhat taken aback by the raves the film has received. The play was always popular in the gay community, and the movie has been similarly embraced by gay culture.

But the appeal doesn't stop there.

"I think maybe that's because the tone is welcoming to all people," Mitchell says. "Through the music and the humor it invites everyone to make use of her story and find comfort in it."

Now that "Hedwig" has launched Mitchell to national prominence, naturally, he's getting offers from Hollywood.

But they're not the kind of offers that interest him.

"I get the kind of offers they give to actors they don't know what to do with — villain in a big action movie. I've got a few of those," he says.

Instead, Mitchell wants to do more writing. He's currently working on a screenplay for a children's movie.

"It's kind of like a cross between 'Willy Wonka' and 'Fanny and Alexander,' " he says.

No doubt, Hedheads will be disappointed. They're probably hoping for "Hedwig II."

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